

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



NEW COLD WAR HOTS UP

Lit fuses in
Ukraine and
Kazakhstan.



Also:

Colston verdict
The Bogey of Overpopulation
Death of a Sociobiologist

Reading Capital as
Crisis Theory: Part 2
Consumerism and Literature



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Cover image: © Ukrainian Border Guards – Markiv Mykhailo

Introducing the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party advocates a society where production is freed from the artificial constraints of profit and organised for the benefit of all on the basis of material abundance. It does not have policies to ameliorate aspects of the existing social system. It is opposed to all war.

The *Socialist Standard* is the combative monthly journal of the Socialist Party, published without interruption since 1904. In the 1930s the *Socialist Standard* explained why capitalism would not collapse of its own accord, in response to widespread claims to the contrary, and continues to hold this view in face of the notion's recent popularity. Beveridge's welfare measures of the 1940s were viewed as a reorganisation of poverty and a necessary 'expense' of production, and Keynesian policies designed to overcome slumps an illusion. Today, the journal exposes as false the view that banks create money out of thin



air, and explains why actions to prevent the depredation of the natural world can have limited effect and run counter to the nature of capitalism itself.

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be transformed through a series of social measures, but have merely become routine managers of the system. The Bolsheviks

had to be content with developing Russian capitalism under a one-party dictatorship. Both failures have given socialism a quite different-- and unattractive-- meaning: state ownership and control. As the *Socialist Standard* pointed out before both courses were followed, the results would more properly be called state capitalism.

The Socialist Party and the World Socialist Movement affirm that capitalism is incapable of meaningful change in the interests of the majority; that the basis of exploitation is the wages/money system. The *Socialist Standard* is proud to have kept alive the original idea of what socialism is-- a classless, stateless, wageless, moneyless society or, defined positively, a democracy in which free and equal men and women co-operate to produce the things they need to live and enjoy life, to which they have free access in accordance with the principle 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'

Sabre-rattling over Ukraine

WESTERN CAPITALIST powers – the USA and its allies in Europe – won the Cold War when the USSR finally collapsed in 1991. It was a humiliating defeat for state-capitalist Russia. Russia lost not only most of what it had conquered in Eastern Europe after WW2 but even parts it had held before. On paper the USSR was a voluntary union of so-called 'socialist republics', one of which was Ukraine, an area that had been contested for centuries and which after the Soviet collapse became an independent state.

The Western capitalist powers moved quickly to extend their sphere of influence and signed up as members of the NATO military alliance all the states that had formed part of the Russian Empire in Eastern Europe. They have long had their eyes on Ukraine, Europe's second largest country after Russia.

A revived and more confident – and openly capitalist – Russia under Putin regards the incorporation of Ukraine into NATO as a threat to its vital interests. Already Russia has taken back Crimea and some Russian-speaking areas in eastern

Ukraine. Now it has massed troops on Ukraine's borders to back up its demand that Ukraine should not join NATO as this would bring US military influence and missiles up to its southern border.

It's a conflict of interest between two openly capitalist powers. This time, 'The West' cannot use the pretext, to disguise its geopolitical aims, of it being an ideological struggle. It is a naked struggle between capitalist powers over spheres of influence. That the Cold War was a case of capitalism versus communism was a sham. And they knew it. When Mikoyan, a top member of the Russian ruling class, visited the USA in 1959 the then US Secretary of State, Dulles, sent a farewell message to him on behalf of President Eisenhower which began: 'The President is aware that you operate under a system of state capitalism' (*Daily Telegraph*, 21 January 1959).

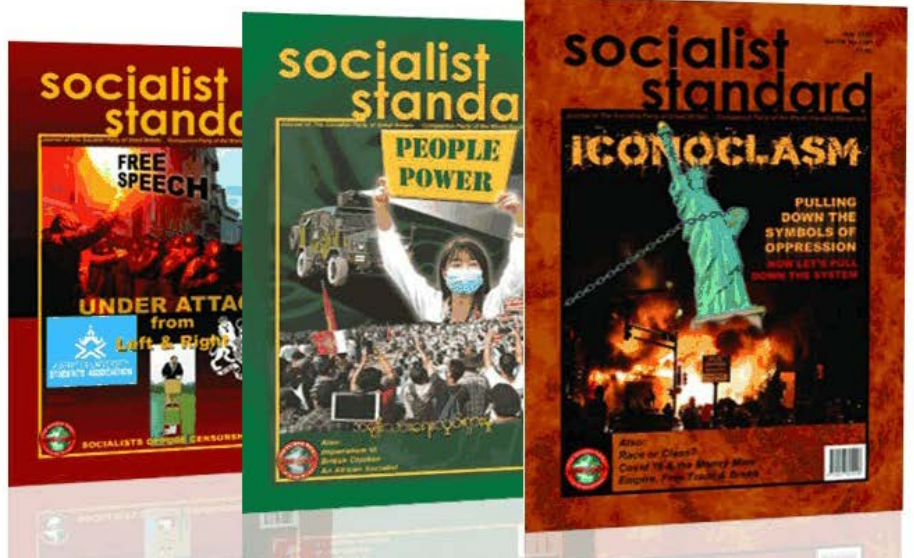
Will it come to war? Probably not as, from a military point of view, Russia could easily overrun most of Ukraine. The Western powers will probably not insist

on formally incorporating Ukraine into NATO. They will back down just as the USSR did in 1962 over the Cuban missile crisis, which is the nearest the world has come to a nuclear war. In fact, according to a headline in *The Times* (13 January), 'Russia threatens US with a new Cuban missile crisis unless NATO stops eastern enlargement'. This will just be more sabre-rattling as the US could easily conquer Cuba and Venezuela.

So, it's a stalemate, a balance of terror. This is why no state can refuse to arm itself with the most terrifying weapons it can afford. Under capitalism might is right and disarmament, a pipe-dream.

The tensions over Ukraine remind us that the climate crisis is not the only threat to the world and its population. Nuclear war is too, and that threat needs to be removed as well. The only way to do this is to end capitalism and replace it with a frontierless, stateless world community based on the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources. In short, world socialism.

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Is capitalism making us lose our marbles?



THE ONGOING pandemic is more than a global health emergency, it's a global mental health emergency, with evidence-based reasoning looking especially battered and bloody. Social media and preference algorithms have in the past decade escalated what were mostly marginal beliefs about pseudo-science, conspiracy theories and vaccine scepticism into what looks like a proliferating mass-psychosis.

Even some Marxists are not immune. A recent email from a French class war group begins 'Behind the endless statist lie of the Coronavirus, a spectre haunts Europe: the spectre of communism.' The spectre of paranoia is more like it.

One doesn't have to dig deep to find the shoddy capitalist motives behind all this. It's not just would-be demagogues like Trump promoting barking-mad QAnon fantasies to get votes. Online 'influencers' have found they can monetise attention by making increasingly outrageous claims that attract shocked followings, thereby earning money from advertisers. Some, like the YouTuber who claims the Roman Empire never existed, will probably remain lone and batty outliers. Others including anti-vaxxers are literally making millions by exploiting people's fear and suggestibility. Twelve of the richest and most shameless grifters are responsible for 65 percent of vaccine misinformation on all social media and 73 percent on Facebook (bit.ly/33pusOJ). Plenty of others are queuing up to plough this lucrative field.

At least half of the population at any one time believes in one or more conspiracy theories (bit.ly/319a21l). Why are humans so vulnerable? Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, currently touting his new book on rationality, thinks we have a natural tendency to tribalism and magical thinking, reined in by civilised society's apparatus of science, fact checking and peer review (bbc.in/3I6WM7m). This is of a piece with his Hobbesian view that we are basically murderous brutes who need to be kept in line by coercive state regimes. But it's a bit rich to be lectured on how to think rationally by someone rather obviously operating from his own set of a priori assumptions. As an example, in a recent BBC series on violence, Pinker commits an egregious sleight-of-hand in extrapolating evidence of Neolithic warfare (ie, from property societies of the last 10,000 years) backwards into the vast 300,000-year period of the non-proprietary Palaeolithic, where no good evidence for it exists (bbc.in/3rt9K8E). As for science, that didn't fall on

us like a gift from the gods either. We created it ourselves precisely because we don't need magical thinking any more than we need police states.

Nonetheless he's right that rationality is not a natural skill but an artificial one, like literacy and numeracy, and one which needs to be cultivated for the good of our 'epistemic environment'. But we're not cultivating it very well, a fact which the monetisers are able to exploit.

They know, for instance, that more than 90 percent of people hold some form of non-rational or delusional belief, from touching wood to wishing people luck. We're all prone to well-known cognitive foibles such as confirmation, desirability and clustering biases, as well as the common habit of leaping to conclusions to save the slow analytical effort of slogging through evidence (bit.ly/3nsXrll).

Poverty and low education are obviously fertile soil for an angry distrust of authority, leading to 'establishment or world-order types of conspiracy', but conversely, smart people can often be the easiest to fool, because of vanity and 'a mistaken belief in their own abilities to filter truth from bullshit' (bit.ly/33hlHGx).

People have a tendency to associate minor events with minor causes, and major events with major causes, a kind of symmetry bias. In one study, a group shown a fictitious story where a presidential assassination attempt failed were willing to believe a lone actor was responsible, but a second group, told the attempt succeeded, were more likely to believe there was a conspiracy behind it (bit.ly/3fpOTH0). If a princess has a car accident, it's just an accident, but if it's upsettingly fatal, that explanation feels too small to fill the yawning emotional hunger for cause to fit effect, so non-random explanations are hunted for, the more convoluted the better. Such an emotional need can be weaponised. Thus a global pandemic becomes no longer just an unforeseen catastrophe but an intentional plot to abolish liberty and turn us into zombies.

Biases creep in when we're not looking. One recent study showed that 'People share fake news online even when they can tell it's not true', but only if the fake news resonates with their own political views. Conversely, they are far less likely to share it if they think it's true, but not in line with their own beliefs. The study found however that if people are first asked to evaluate a news story, they are much less

likely to pass it on if they think it's false, regardless of their own views, suggesting that we can be more analytical if prompted (bit.ly/3ttRDCm).

Then there is the remarkable fact that if you are simply told a thing, you are less likely to believe it than if you have to solve a puzzle to discover it, so that a cleverly written narrative using fake evidence is more effective if it makes the reader work to unravel the implications (bit.ly/3nrdvdQ).

Fortunately these tricks don't work on everyone because there are also other mechanisms at work, notably 'plausibility checking', which relies on comparing new information to known and reliable sources. This may explain why, for instance, studies show that political campaigns don't really work in changing the minds of voters, and why Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda had little effect in areas with no history of prejudice (bit.ly/31Y9yFM). Nevertheless, it's questionable how many people routinely employ plausibility checking given that it runs against the grain of intuitive thinking, in short, it's more effort.

So the internet is confronting us with a rationality crisis, because there's money in them thar shills. In one town, fake news is the main industry (cnn.it/3Ab6Vx5). Capitalism could do more to fight this trend, of course, but it has no great interest in us being rational because rational people would get rid of it. It spews myths the way a factory spews smoke, hiding itself inside a cloud of bogus values, bogus facts and bogus scapegoats.

How should socialists answer those who believe in global hoaxes and conspiracies? Patient refutation doesn't work because their views are built on self-fulfilling logic. Expecting attack, they become adept at defensive attrition, demanding evidence and then ignoring it, changing the subject constantly to keep you off-balance and playing catch-up, knowing it's all more exhausting for you than it is for them. But despite everything, people often do recover from such cognitive traps, just like they recover from religious delusions. Some deeper reason reasserts itself. All we can do is show empathy for whatever emotional need has driven them into the trap in the first place and nudge them supportively towards the larger truth, which is that their real enemy is not a thing you can touch or a group of people you can hate, but a simple set of social relationships, ones we have the power to change together.

PJS

Colston verdict – the big picture



Credit: PA

TORY MPS were spitting feathers last month after four Black Lives Matters activists were acquitted of criminal damage by a jury at Bristol Crown Court after pulling down the statue of a seventeenth-century slave trader and chucking it in the harbour during the BLM protests in 2020.

The verdict will have come as a surprise to some who expected an open and shut case, as the defendants were filmed on CCTV and so were scarcely in a position to deny the deed. Their somewhat tenuous defence was that the presence of the statue was in itself a 'hate crime' and that therefore its removal was in line with current legislation. Even more dubiously, they argued that as the statue was public property, and they were members of the public, they had a right to dispose of their own property as they saw fit. It's hard to imagine any jury being persuaded by either of these arguments, but they were probably more exercised by the prospect of appearing to endorse slavery if they went the other way, so delivered an acquittal verdict anyway.

Unsurprisingly the prosecution case was that it didn't matter who Colston was, that the law was clear: people couldn't run around wrecking monuments they didn't like. This was also the line taken by government ministers and Tory backbenchers, who are always the first to leap nobly to the defence of a set of laws which protect their wealth and privilege.

Transport minister, Grant Shapps spoke for many of them, saying 'we live in a democratic country. If you want to see things changed you can get them changed, you do that through the ballot box, or petitioning your local council, etc. You don't do it by going out and causing criminal damage'.

The problem with this is that there had already been legal campaigns, for no less than 100 years, to remove this statue, but from 1920 onwards these had resulted in no action because no government had ever bothered to establish a framework for the democratic removal of a public monument, on whatever grounds.

Tory yahoos immediately fulminated that 'the result of this ruling will be that mobs will seek to tear down statues across the country – it gives a green light for

mobs', and that 'as a country we need to protect our heritage from mob rule'. Note how quickly 'the people' becomes 'the mob' in government parlance when they do anything the establishment doesn't like. It's democracy when it pleases our masters; it's ochlocracy when it doesn't.

Respect for venerable monuments did not stop Shapps from muttering darkly about changing the rules of jury trials to prevent juries delivering verdicts that upset the government. Possibly sensing that red-eyed zombie rage was taking over the Tory camp, arch-Tory Jacob Rees Mogg felt obliged to state that, when it came to great monuments, the British jury system was up there with the best of them, and loose talk about pulling it down just because of one trivial verdict was not hugely constructive. Boris Johnson meanwhile, showing as ever his forensic grasp of historical matters, opined that it was wrong for people 'to go round seeking retrospectively to change our history'.

The big picture

This echoes the recent furore engulfing the National Trust, whose current policy of daring to mention slavery in connection with the history of landed estates and country piles has provoked allegations of 'wokeism' and even death threats against its senior figures. But it seems clear to anyone who has ever visited these estates that slavery has been largely airbrushed out of the pretty picture to spare the blushes of the current owners. All that NT bosses have tried to do is restore the real truth about where the money came from that paid for these country piles in the first place. The argument that this is somehow 'historical revisionism' is as transparent as it is hypocritical. Many of Britain's rich got to be rich through slavery, and consequently many of the monuments, palaces and public buildings of Britain's cities, and of the former slave ports of Bristol and Liverpool, deserve to be understood in this context. This being so, it's not unreasonable to suggest that statues of slave owners are a continuing and blatant affront to human decency which should have been removed decades ago. If the state wasn't going

to do it, then individuals would have to instead, and as it turned out, the Bristol jury had no problem with that.

The even bigger picture

But this is not what's really bothering the frothing Tory MPs. They couldn't care less about history, gesture politics, or statues. What worries them is that a jury can take such a cavalier attitude to the destruction of property, because property is what makes the rich rich. If the *mobile vulgus* can take down a statue today, what's to stop them taking down Buckingham Palace tomorrow? Or taking over the lands of the Duke of Westminster, or any private mansion? Property is a concept that underpins capitalism, and it has acquired a fetishised totemic power in the minds of workers. It demands to be respected, worshiped even, as a sacrosanct and inviolable thing. But like all fetishes, its power is only apparent, not real. Once people stop believing in it, it ceases to exist. It is like a vast bubble of magical nothingness which holds society in its thrall. And, shock horror, the Bristol jury went and stuck a pin in it.

Not that capitalism will implode just because of that. But the rich are terrified of workers losing their awe of private property. Once they do that, they might start asking themselves why there are rich people at all, and why they, the workers, are obliged to be poor and waste their lives as wage slaves in order for those rich people to enjoy luxury and idleness. As socialists often say, the rich are much more class-conscious than workers, at least for now. They know that they owe their wealth to the despoliation of the planet and the utter subjection and exploitation of the overwhelming majority of the population. They also realise that workers, organised collectively, have a real and irresistible power that could sweep them away utterly, while their own power as a tiny minority resides in nothing but fetishised symbols, rituals and customs. In short, they know how weak they really are.

Society now accepts that slavery is an indefensible crime against humanity. The Bristol verdict suggests that workers now take a dim view of public monuments glorifying it, regardless of who the monuments belong to or what laws are in place to preserve them. But many of the arguments against slavery also apply to the practice of wage slavery, which is part of the machinery of capitalism and which condemns billions to relentless misery. We look forward to the moment when workers stop respecting its monuments and institutions too, and start pulling down more than a few statues.

PJS

Unfair Shares

'THE WORLD'S 10 richest people added \$402 billion to their fortunes in 2021', CNBC reported on 30 December. 'They were led by Tesla CEO, Elon Musk, who this year became the world's richest man and briefly saw his net worth top \$300 billion. He added \$121 billion to his net worth in 2021 — just shy of the \$140 billion he added in 2020' (tinyurl.com/2p9fctc5).

This way of putting it is misleading, though not as bad as saying that these multibillionaires 'earned' it. Musk did nothing to add to his 'net worth'. It just got added as the market price of the shares he owns in Tesla and other companies happened to increase by the end of 2021 compared to what it had been at the beginning. The increase doesn't necessarily even represent any increase in real wealth as it does not correspond to an increase in anything useful made from materials that originally came from nature.

The *Independent* (13 October), carried an article, 'How much does Jeff Bezos make per minute?' It distinguished between his income and his 'net worth' and calculated his total income as \$1,691,840 a year, or \$3.20 a minute. This is the money Bezos, then the richest man

in the world, had in 2020 to spend on his personal luxuries such as a space trip or to invest. The increase in his net worth, however, was calculated as \$75 billion, or \$142,667 a minute, over 44 times as much (tinyurl.com/a3caa726). Musk's income in 2020, at \$595 million, was rather more but still only a fraction of the \$140 billion his net worth increased by that year.

As an individual's net worth is calculated by multiplying the number of shares they hold by their current market price, what we are talking about here is an increase in the price of the shares these multibillionaires own. A share is principally a claim on the future profits on the capital invested by the business concerned, or, as Marx put it, 'merely a title of ownership to a corresponding portion of the surplus value realised by it.'

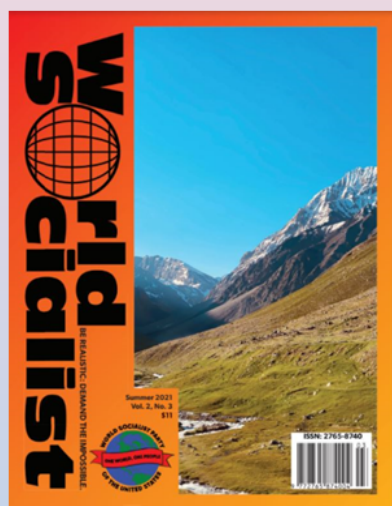
The market price of a share is the income as profit that it is expected to bring, converted into a capital sum. This is brought about by the play of supply and demand on the stock exchange, with demand influenced by possible future profits and so includes a large element of speculation. Marx called the capital sum resulting from converting future profits in this way 'fictitious capital', fictitious in the

sense that it did not simply represent actual capital invested in exploiting wage-labour for surplus value. It principally represented claims on future wealth; in other words, on wealth that does not exist as yet:

'Even when the promissory note — the security — does not represent a purely fictitious capital, as it does in the case of state debts, the capital-value of such paper is nevertheless wholly illusory' (*Capital*, Vol. 3, ch. 29).

What is 'illusory' is not the legal title to a future income stream from surplus value nor its worth, but that the market price of shares represents real wealth in addition to the net value of the capital in the enterprise. Equally illusory is the idea that that an increase in the market price of these legal titles represents an increase in wealth.

If all stocks, shares and bonds were to disappear the amount of wealth in the world, that is, wealth that can be consumed or used to produce more wealth, would be quite unchanged. That is what will happen in socialism where the commonly owned means and instruments of production will be used to directly satisfy people's needs rather than as today to yield a profit.



World Socialist

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'Don't you wish you were free...?'



'There's a debate going on among the disaffected/terrified over which dystopian novel we're now living in. Some point to social media addiction and designer drugs to suggest *Brave New World*. Others see mass surveillance and pandemic lockdowns. Each of these opinions seems valid, which is confusing... Turns out we're not in a single dystopian novel. We're in all of them simultaneously' (dollarcollapse.com, 17 December).

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984* also form part of the Venn diagram of our overlapping dystopian oppression along with *A Handmaid's Tale*, *Brazil*, *Clockwork Orange*, *Gattaca*, *Logan's Run*, as well as *Soylent Green*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *The Matrix*.

'You're bought as soon as they pay you a salary.'

The film *Soylent Green*, which is loosely based on Harry Harrison's novel *Make Room! Make Room!*, dates from 1973 and depicts a future (2022!) in which food shortages and overpopulation feature prominently – New York City alone has forty million inhabitants, which is over four times the current total – and there are many who opine that such 'problems' form part of reality today. They are wrong.

'In 1798, Thomas Malthus argued that human populations tend to increase more rapidly than their food supplies, which would lead to mass starvation. More than 150 years later, Paul Ehrlich predicted that "hundreds of millions would starve to death" in the 1970s and '80s due to overpopulation. What both men missed is mankind's propensity for problem solving and innovation, which, thanks to capitalism and globalization, has seen rates of food insecurity decrease, while the world's population has skyrocketed' (nationalpost.com, December 23).

Yet under capitalism, where the profit motive reigns supreme, food is destroyed and famines persist in a world of potential abundance.

'Do you ever read any of the books you burn?'

Socialists do not call for *The National Post* to be censored because it promotes the dystopia known as free market capitalism. Indeed, we oppose censorship and, of course, its extreme expression in the form of book burning.

'It had started two meetings prior when two parents addressed the board during Public Comments to complain about two books on the high school's shelves, *Call Me By Your Name* by André Aciman and *33 Snowfish* by Adam Rapp. In response, the board voted 6-0 to remove all "sexually explicit" books from the high school shelves, though it never defined what constituted "sexually explicit". Going further, two members, Mr. Rabih Abuismail and Mr. Kirk Twigg, suggested that they might burn any books they found to be inappropriate' (bookandfilmglobe.com, 19 December).

Ray Bradbury's classic *Fahrenheit 451* has itself been censored, but not, like copies of *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto*, burned in public. His novel concerns a future American society where books are outlawed and 'firemen' burn any that are found. Arguably, perhaps the most horrifying depiction of book burning appears in Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose*. Guy Montag, a fireman in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, who becomes disillusioned with his role of censoring literature and destroying knowledge (he eventually quits his job and commits himself to the preservation of books) might just agree.

'Who cares?'

William Golding, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1983, is (in)famous for his debut novel *Lord of the Flies* which concerns a group of schoolboys who are stranded on an uninhabited coral island and their struggle to survive. The boys' differing personalities soon determine their function within the group: leaders, followers, outcasts. Soon they are organised hierarchically and, shortly after, divided into tribes. The adventure is provided by the boys' growing fear of The Beast, an apparently natural danger which threatens to destroy them. Life adapts to a chain of ordered survivalism in defence against the Beast. There are those who think The Beast an invention and others who seek to hunt and kill it. But the reader, guided by Golding, comes soon to see The Beast is neither an infantile invention of self-torment nor a conquerable

enemy from without. Few novels have so eloquently served the cause of capitalist ideology which contends that humans are inherently aggressive, gullible, self-serving, easily led and un-cooperative. Growing evidence from modern anthropology and archaeology tells us otherwise. Graeber & Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything* 'reins in history's rules and replaces them with a radical, uncompromising play, not such that we are overwhelmed with an infinity of nihilistic political choices, but so we may finally articulate and follow the values that lead to our better possible world' (thequietus.com, December 18).

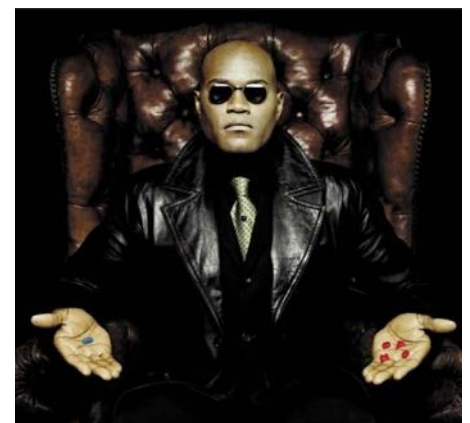
Neo: 'What truth?'

Morpheus: 'That you are a slave.'

We have a choice, not unlike that of Morpheus in *The Matrix 4*.

'As Bugs offers Morpheus a blue pill or a red pill, she remembers her own experience with initially discovering the truth about the Matrix and receiving the same offer to pursue the truth or return to her false reality...For characters such as Bugs and Morpheus, once they have realized the deeper truth about existence they could never be satisfied going back to living a lie. In a franchise about enlightenment and self-discovery, this quote speaks to the powerful nature of truth' (screenrant.com, 26 December).

We need to take the red pill of socialist understanding. 'All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind... He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance, and for the propagation of his race' (*The Communist Manifesto*, 1848).



UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

All meetings online during the pandemic.
See page 23.

LONDON

North London branch. Meets 3rd Thurs. 8pm at Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX. Contact: Chris Dufton 020 7609 0983 nlb.spgb@gmail.com

South London branch. Meets last Saturday in month, 2.30pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Contact: 020 7622 3811.

West London branch. Meets 1st Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. spgb@worldsocialism.org

MIDLANDS

West Midlands regional branch. Meets last Sat. 3pm (check before attending). Contact: Stephen Shapton. 01543 821180. Email: stephenshapton@yahoo.co.uk.

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

Contact: P. Kilgallon, c/o Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN.

Lancaster branch. Meets 3rd Mon, 3pm, Friends Meeting House, Meeting House Lane. Ring to confirm: P. Shannon, 07510 412 261, spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org.

Manchester branch. Contact: Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. 0161 860 7189.

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

Cumbria. Contact: Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG.

Doncaster. Contact: Fredi Edwards, fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Meets 2nd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ. Contact: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org.

South West regional branch. Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm at the Railway Tavern, 131 South Western Road, Salisbury SP2 7RR.

Contact: Stephen Harper spgbsw@gmail.com

Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden,

anton@pruden.me

Canterbury. Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB.

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Essex. Contact: Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. patdeutz@gmail.com.

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Was Money Abolished in Cambodia?



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THE KHMER Rouge governed Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. It was an authoritarian regime, possibly responsible for as many as two million deaths, the result of famine and executions. One of its policies still sometimes remembered today is its supposed abolition of money. As self-proclaimed ‘Communists’, the Khmer Rouge leaders allegedly wanted a society with no wages or means of exchange, hence no money.

Some writers claim that this abolition of money had, and still has, negative consequences for Cambodian society. For instance, an article by Sheridan Prasso (eastwestcenter.org, January 2001) claimed that, although money had by then been in use again in Cambodia for over twenty years, its former abolition had made people there distrustful of money, hence their preference for US dollars or gold and the ineffectiveness of the Cambodian financial system. More recently, Anirudh Bhati (mekongresearch.org, 19 June 2018) has argued that Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge had no money, private property or trade, and states that ‘without money — and therefore without effective trade — there is no possible freedom.’ As can be seen, supporters of capitalism have sometimes seen the abolition of money in Cambodia as an argument against socialism, against the very idea of a moneyless society based on free access.

But it simply is not true: the Khmer Rouge did not do away with money in Cambodia. This was pointed out by an article in the October 1978 *Socialist Standard*, citing contemporary reports of various kinds. There was still exchange of some goods, and rice, fish and rubber were exported in order to acquire foreign currency. Most Cambodians lived on little more than rice, and that probably was

distributed without using money, but the Khmer Rouge and their soldiers were better fed and clothed than the rest of the population: privilege need not imply having greater access to money. Ieng Sary, a Khmer Rouge leader, had accepted in 1976 that a monetary system might be set up later, but in fact such a system already existed, even if ordinary Cambodians had few or no dealings with it. As Prasso says, Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot ‘apparently concluded that money was fine for the state but not for its people’.

This whole issue was recently raised again by James Tyner in an article ‘“Currency is a Most Poisonous Tool”: State Capitalism, Nonmarket Socialism, and the Elimination of Money during the Cambodian Genocide’ in the open-access on-line journal *Genocide Studies and Prevention* Volume 14, 2020. He notes correctly that, ‘Marx’s vision of a stateless, moneyless and classless society aimed to encourage the fullest development of human consciousness and creativity’, and then investigates to what extent the Khmer Rouge approached this goal.

Before seizing power, Khmer Rouge leaders had discussed abolishing money, and they announced its supposed elimination in September 1975, just five months after taking control. Workers received food rations, with more for those who performed the heaviest manual labour. Rations were fixed but the working day was expanded, resulting in an increase in what Marx termed absolute surplus value (see *Capital* Vol 1, chs 12 and 16). But the rulers still needed to ‘raise investment capital for a moribund industrial sector’, and this was done by exporting rice and other goods for sale. Tyner writes that ‘On the one hand, party leaders participated in

the monetary-based global economy as state capitalists while, on the other hand, they instituted a nonmonetary, nonmarket domestic economy’ and ‘the resultant economic order of Democratic Kampuchea resembled more so a hybrid form of state capitalism and nonmarket socialism than it did either a barter economy or an economy of associated producers as envisioned by Marx.’ But there simply cannot be a mixture of state capitalism (or any form of capitalism) and socialism: the former has money, wages, profits, the latter has none of these. The vast majority of Cambodians certainly did not live in a society of free access and democratic control: they were extremely poor and subject to brutal exploitation and oppression.

One noteworthy aspect of his article is the fact that the idea of state capitalism is almost seen as commonplace, not something that needs to be described or explained at length. A footnote defines it as ‘a political-economic system of governance whereby a ruling party controls the state apparatus and in turn manages the means of production in order to appropriate surplus value’, and refers to writers such as Tony Cliff and Richard Wolff.

Marx certainly advocated a society without money (see the *Socialist Standard* for April 1980), but he saw money’s disappearance as part and parcel of the establishment of common ownership and production for use by workers who supported this and were prepared to make it work. It was not something that could be done by itself, with few or no other changes in society, and certainly not after a military takeover of the state, as happened in Cambodia.

PAUL BENNETT

Uprising in Kazakhstan

THE LATEST wave of protests began in Janaozen (sometimes spelled Zhanaozen), an oil town in western Kazakhstan. It was here that police shot down unarmed strikers in December 2011. Ten years later, the oilmen again struck for higher wages, better working conditions and the right to organise. The immediate triggers were the layoff in December of 40,000 workers by the main local employer, Tengiz Chevron Oil (75 percent US-owned), followed on New Year's Day by the doubling of the price of the liquefied natural gas used in vehicles.

On 2 January a protest meeting started in the main square. Next day the strike began to spread. Roads were blockaded. By 4 January all the oilmen of western Kazakhstan were on strike; in the evening they were joined by the coalminers and metalworkers of central Kazakhstan. Non-stop mass meetings were now in progress in some dozen cities. New demands appeared, such as lowering the pension age, but the emphasis remained on 'bread-and-butter' issues.

On 5 January mass meetings began in the Russian-speaking cities of northern and eastern Kazakhstan. The protests now encompassed the entire country, with the exception of the capital of Nur-Sultan – previously Akmola and then Astana before being renamed in honor of former president Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Politicisation

The last few days before the crackdown saw a politicisation of the protests. Political as well as economic demands were now raised, including an end to arrests, release of political prisoners, the resignation of President Tokayev, Nazarbayev's successor, and the final departure of Nazarbayev himself, no longer president but still head of the Security Council of Kazakhstan. Some called for restoration of the Constitution of 1993, which had divided power between president and parliament more equally than later 'super-presidential' constitutions. Others demanded a purely

parliamentary system with no executive presidency.

It seems that at this time there were also attempts to form committees and councils to coordinate the protest movement, and also a 'Council of Elders'.

It is worth noting what sorts of demands were *not* raised. In sharp contrast to the mass protests in Ukraine, there were no demands to change the foreign policy orientation of the country. Nor did any of the demands raised concern 'ethnic' issues such as the relative status of the Kazakh and Russian languages (Kazakh is the 'state language' but both are 'official languages').

What happened in Almaty?

Although protestors in several cities did topple statues of Nazarbayev or occupy government buildings, protests in most places were peaceful: they did not entail violence against people. However, events in Almaty developed very differently.

Almaty is the biggest city in Kazakhstan. During the Soviet period and the first few years of independence it was the republic's capital. Even after the capital was moved to Akmola in 1997, Akmola/Astana remained the country's main commercial, cultural and intellectual centre.

On the night of 4 January, protestors marched to the main square of Almaty, where they managed to push back the police lines and gain the upper hand. Some policemen were seen to flee or even change sides. Stores were looted, bank branches trashed, police cars burned. There were also raids on armouries – a fact that helps explain the emergence of armed insurgents who that night seized control of Almaty International Airport and a number of suburban districts.

The protestors dispersed in the early morning hours of 5 January, but returned about 10am. Over the course of the day, both the city administration building and the police headquarters were stormed and set on fire.

The insurgency in Almaty lasted no longer than 24 hours – from nightfall on 4 January to nightfall on the 5th. It appears that at this time President Tokayev was afraid of losing all control over the situation. He announced a series of concessions: he made the government resign, removed Nazarbayev, lowered the price of gas, and promised to provide assistance to the poorest families. This was also when he appealed for help to other members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Russia promised to send troops, as did Belarus and Armenia.

As it turned out, Tokayev was able to defeat the insurgency without the aid of foreign troops. On the night of 5 January, police units regained control of central Almaty, the airport and the suburban districts that the insurgents had seized the night before.

The plane carrying the first 'peacekeepers' from Russia landed on 6 January. Their trucks and armoured vehicles trundled around the streets of Almaty. Now and then residents could hear what sounded like gunfire. On 16 January the last Russian troops flew home.

Who were the organisers?

While most strikers and protestors came from the regular workforce, the looters and insurgents in Almaty were 'marginals' – resentful young men from the countryside who live in certain suburban districts and are unemployed or occupy poorly paid casual jobs. But armed insurgency – and especially seizure of the airport, 15 kilometres from the city – requires a certain amount of organisation, planning and preparation. So who were the organisers?

Putin and Tokayev point the finger at 'criminals' and 'radical Islamic terrorists' backed by unidentified forces outside Kazakhstan. While this may help explain disturbances elsewhere in Central Asia, especially in Uzbekistan, it is highly implausible in the case of Kazakhstan. Although most Kazakhs are nominally

Moslem, Islam lacks deep roots in Kazakh society and political Islam has very little influence. The purpose of resorting to this bogeyman may be to justify a harsh response to the protests in the eyes of Westerners and Chinese who know little about the people of the region and are influenced by racial stereotypes. This effect is enhanced by blurring the distinction between armed insurgency and peaceful protest and by ignoring the fact that members of all of Kazakhstan's ethnic groups participated in the protests, including traditionally Christian Slavs.

A Russian colleague who knows Kazakhstan well has a much more plausible explanation in terms of clan politics. Why, he asks, did Nazarbayev move the capital to Akmola in 1997? The official reasons were that Akmola/Astana is susceptible to earthquakes and too close to the border with China. He suggests another reason: the danger to Nazarbayev's position posed by hostile local clans. The recent insurgency may have been organised by the heads of these clans, who are at the same time small or medium businessmen and therefore dispose of the necessary resources.

Be that as it may, the events in Almaty point to the need to investigate possibly significant regional differences in how the uprising developed and whose interests it served.

Another Colour Revolution?

The leaders of authoritarian post-Soviet regimes in Russia and its close allies live in mortal fear of so-called 'Colour Revolutions' of the kind that have overthrown similar regimes in other post-Soviet states. These revolutions, though justified in terms of democracy and human rights, are in fact carried out on the initiative and in the

interests of Western powers.

The EU and the US were indeed deeply involved in Ukraine's Orange Revolution. However, there is hardly any sign of such involvement in the uprising in Kazakhstan.

True, there is a party called Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK), led by a group of anti-Nazarbayev Kazakh businessmen and former state officials in exile in France. It stands for parliamentary democracy and genuine – as opposed to crony – capitalism. The DCK website (bit.ly/3tzU6Ly) focuses extensively on the gross corruption of Nazarbayev and his relatives (he, his daughter and his son-in-law are all billionaires). Apparently DCK has used social media to encourage and facilitate protest inside Kazakhstan. It is hard to judge its impact. Perhaps its leaders have connections in Western intelligence agencies.

What seems more significant is that Western oil companies with investments in Kazakhstan have been demanding the restoration of 'order'. Strangely enough, they don't like strikes and demands for higher wages. The main interest of Western capitalists in Kazakhstan is continued easy access to its vast natural resources. It doesn't bother them if Kazakh politicians grab a hefty chunk of the proceeds for themselves. What else is new?

As for drawing Kazakhstan fully into the Western sphere of interest, this is not currently viewed as a realistic goal. No one is talking about admitting Kazakhstan to NATO or the EU. For Kazakhstan, as for Central Asia more broadly, there are just two candidates for hegemon – Russia and China.

Aftermath

Gradually but surely, things are returning to normal – or so the *Astana Times* assures

us. The official figure for the number of people killed, probably much too low, is 164. Some 10,000 people have been arrested. Where are they and what will happen to them?

A new government has been appointed. Not quite as new as it might have been, seeing that 11 of the 20 old ministers are back in office and the new prime minister is the first deputy of the old prime minister.

President Tokayev acknowledges that socio-economic problems underlay 'the tragic events'. Measures must be taken to narrow the gulf between rich and poor. Taxes on the extraction of mineral resource must be increased. At the same time, foreign investors must be reassured so that they do not withdraw their capital (by making them pay higher taxes?). He calls on citizens to 'get involved in building a new Kazakhstan'. Time will tell how far this reformist rhetoric will go and how long it will last.

Karim Massimov, head of the National Security Committee and a former prime minister, has been arrested 'on suspicion of treason'. Educated in China, fluent in Chinese and friends with senior Chinese officials, he has promoted economic ties with China and advocated a foreign policy of 'balancing' between Russia and China. It is hard not to see 'the hand of Moscow' behind this astonishing event. The Russian leadership seem to be exploiting the dependence of the Tokayev regime on Russian support to exclude any Chinese influence from Kazakhstan.

Nazarbayev has disappeared from view. He may be in Switzerland, where his daughter and son-in-law have a \$75 million luxury villa.

STEFAN



Reading *Capital* as Crisis Theory: Part 2

We conclude our article on Marx's theory of crises based mainly on the interpretation of the Marx-scholar Samezo Kuruma.

WHAT FACTORS within capitalism transform the possibility of crisis (discussed in Part 1) into an actual crisis? Considering this question requires an understanding of what Marx means by his enigmatic statement that the 'true barrier to capitalist production is capital itself' (*Capital* Vol. 3, Penguin, p. 358).

Capitalism tore down the *external* barriers posed by feudalism and other modes of production, and in so doing freed up the space needed for its own development. But even though it eliminated 'the limits not corresponding to it, which were barriers to it', Marx observes, 'it is by no means the case that

it thereby suspended all limits, nor all barriers'; it remains limited 'by itself' and 'by its own conditions of life' (*Grundrisse*, Penguin, p. 650).

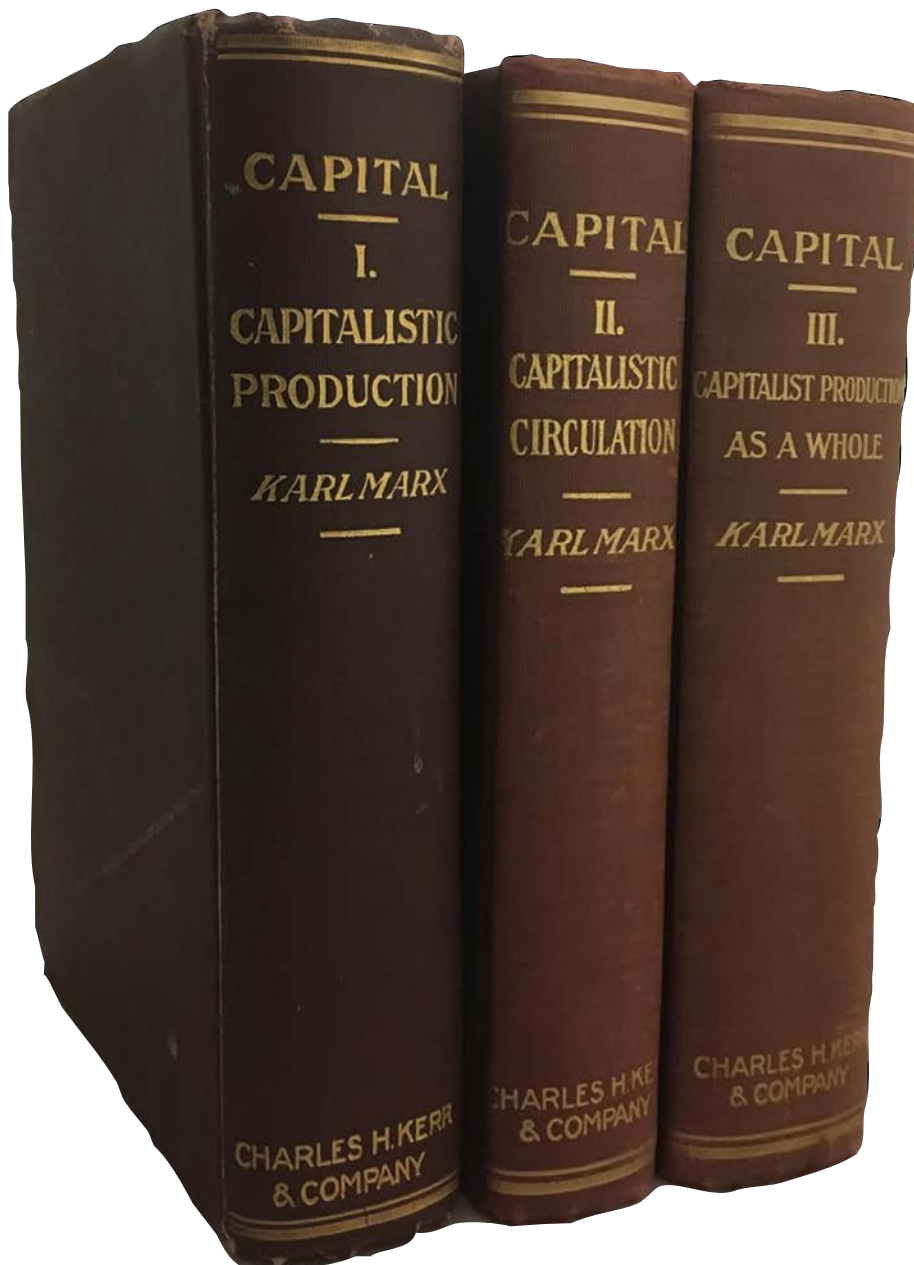
In Volume 3 of *Capital*, Marx notes that 'the methods of production that capital must apply to its purpose and which set its course toward an unlimited expansion of production' continually run up against the 'barriers within which the maintenance and valorization of capital-value has necessarily to move'. In short, "the *means* – the unrestricted development of the forces of social production – comes into persistent conflict with the *restricted end*, the valorization of the existing capital' (pp. 359–60).

The powerful drive of capital to continually augment itself by developing the productive forces *without limit* runs up against a barrier that capital itself imposes as self-expanding value. In *Grundrisse*, Marx says that capital by its nature 'posits a *barrier* to labour and value-creation, in contradiction to its tendency to expand them boundlessly' and as such 'it is the living contradiction' (p. 421).

A crisis can be understood as arising from the tension generated from capital pushing beyond its own barriers to develop productive power without limit.

Capital as a 'Living Contradiction'

In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx explains the motive underlying the incessant drive to raise productivity under capitalism. Introducing improved production conditions that raise the productivity of labour allows individual capitals to produce commodities using less labour time. As a result, the 'individual value' of those commodities is lower than the 'social value' for the given commodity type, which is determined by the labour time necessary under *average* production conditions. If the commodities produced under improved conditions are sold at the prevailing market price, an 'extra surplus value' can be obtained (as the difference between the 'individual' and the 'social' value). But an even neater trick is to sell



the commodities below the 'social value' but above their 'individual value' so as to still pocket extra surplus value but also ensure the sale of the commodities and undersell competitors.

The desire among individual capitals for profit is insatiable, expressing a survival instinct in the capitalist jungle, so their drive to raise productivity toward that end is also without limit. But this drive that seems absolute collides with barriers imposed by capitalism as a system of production for profit.

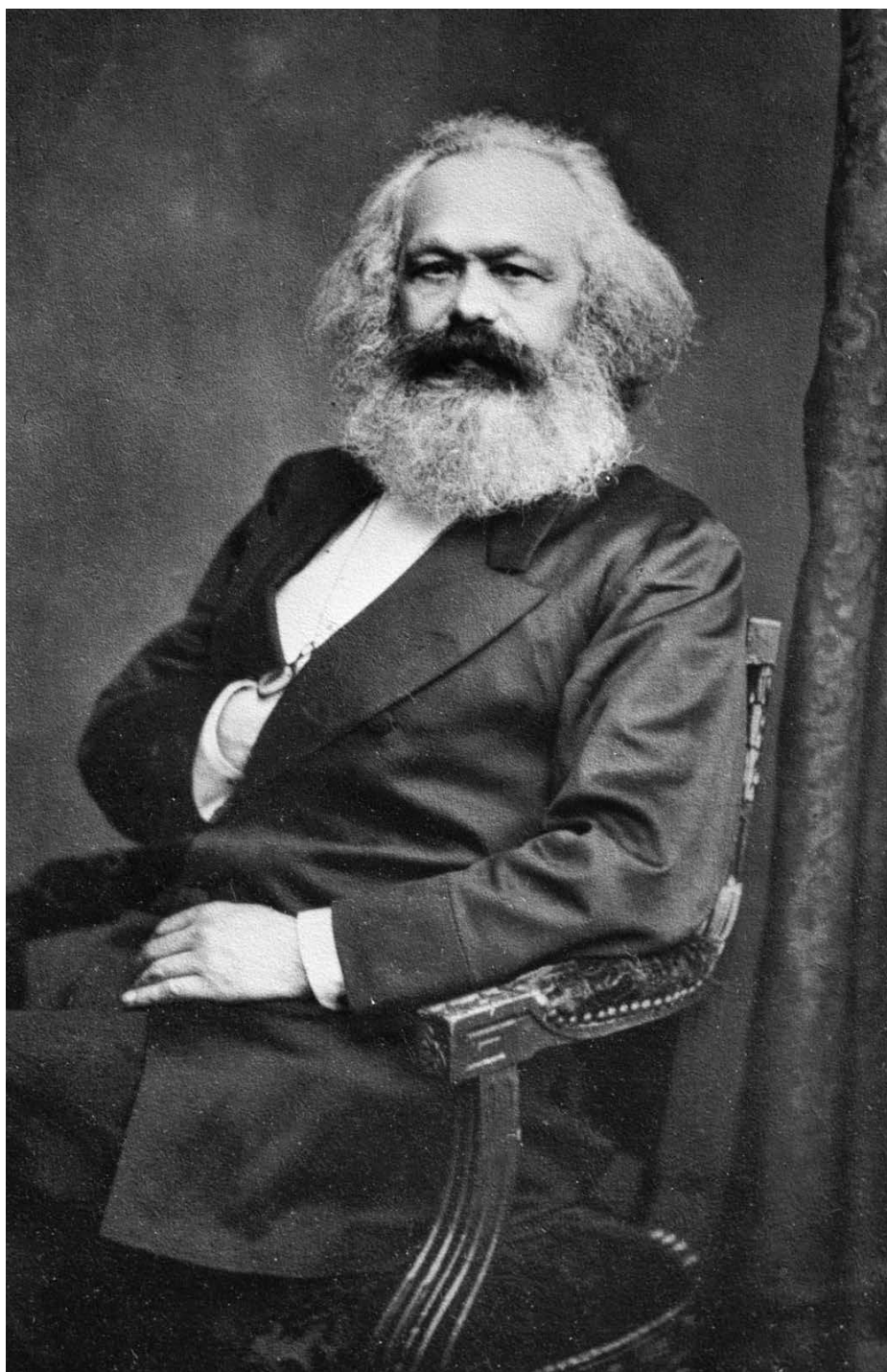
In the realm of immediate production, where the aim is the *creation* of surplus value, capital confronts three barriers according to Marx: it must have the necessary means of production, a sufficiently large working population, and an adequate level of labour exploitation (i.e. rate of surplus value). Capital does everything in its power to secure sufficient labour power that can be adequately exploited, including extending the working day and tapping into cheaper sources of labour power.

But capital cannot rest on its laurels after extracting surplus labour from workers in the production process. That only brings the 'first act' to an end: it is still necessary to sell the commodities produced to *realise* the surplus value created. If this 'second act' is a flop, all that good exploitation will have gone to waste and it will be difficult, if not impossible, to continue capital accumulation.

The barriers within the circulation process include the need for sufficient demand for specific use-values (backed by adequate purchasing power), enough money to realise the surplus value created, and the transformation of the commodities produced into money via sales. Capital is restricted, in other words, by the 'proportionality between the different branches of production and by the society's power of consumption'. But the barrier posed by consumption is not determined by the *absolute* consumption needs of society, Marx is careful to note that this is 'the power of consumption within a given framework of antagonistic conditions of distribution, which reduce the consumption of the vast majority of society to a minimum level' (*Capital* Vol. 3, p. 352). Reformists who think that crisis could be overcome by raising working-class consumption are treating capitalism as if it were a system of production for use rather than profit.

'Double-edged Law' of Accumulation

Understanding how capital as a 'living contradiction' relates specifically to crisis requires taking a closer look at the consequences of raising productivity.



As productivity rises, relatively less labour is needed to utilise the machinery and other means of production, so that the quantity of the means of production increases in proportion to the quantity of labour. Expressed in terms of value, this means that the quantity of 'constant capital' invested in the means of production increases compared to the quantity of 'variable capital' invested in labour power. Marx calls this a heightening of the 'organic composition of capital'.

The 'constant capital' is so named because its value is merely transferred to the finished product (without adding any new value), whereas the use of 'variable capital' in the production process can generate surplus value. This is why the rate of surplus value, which expresses the degree of labour exploitation, is calculated

by dividing the quantity of surplus value by the variable capital. The rate of profit, in contrast, is surplus value divided by variable *and* constant capital. Thus, even if the rate of surplus value remains the same, the profit rate will fall if the proportion of constant to variable capital increases.

Marx argues that the rate of profit will tend to decline as the organic composition of capital rises through the development of productivity. This is his 'law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit' presented in Volume 3 of *Capital*. But Marx is careful to describe this as a 'double-edged law' because the 'decline in the profit *rate* [is] coupled with a simultaneous increase in the absolute *mass* of profit' (p. 326).

If individual capitals are to survive through continued expansion, they must

make up for the fall in the profit rate by expanding the quantity of profit. For example, a capital of 1,000 at 40 percent produces 400 in profit, so if the profit rate falls by half to 20 percent, the capital invested would have to increase in the inverse ratio, to 2,000, in order to just yield the same 400 in profit. And if the mass of profit is to grow, the capital would have to increase at a higher ratio than the ratio at which the profit rate fell. The declining rate of profit thus accelerates the accumulation of capital.

Marx has been ridiculed for arguing that there is a tendency for the rate of profit to gradually fall, but this was widely considered an unquestionable fact that had to be explained. Adam Smith had attributed the tendency to increased competition among capitals, while Ricardo pinned the blame on increased grain prices due to the 'law of diminishing returns on land'. For Marx, the key question was not *whether* the profit rate tended to fall or not but *why* the decline is not more rapid despite steadily increasing productivity. In other words: Why is the fall *tendential* rather than absolute?

Marx answers this question by pointing to counteracting factors to the law, which include the more intense exploitation of labour (ie, increased rate of surplus value), the cheapening of the value of constant capital, and the expansion of the relative surplus population that drives down the value of labour. Such factors are said to moderate the tendency for profit to fall. However, it is important to note that the counteracting factors operate *within* the same 'law' since they all arise from the same reasons that produce the tendential fall in the rate of profit, namely the increase in the productive power of labour.

Phases of the industrial cycle

One way to understand the relation of the 'double-edged law' to crisis is to trace the way the law unfolds across what Marx calls the 'industrial cycle' (also known as the 'business cycle'). Marx identified the following phases of a typical industrial cycle: moderate activity, prosperity, overproduction, and crisis and stagnation.

The destruction of capital through the explosion of crisis and the stagnation that follows is not enough to get a new cycle going. Some impetus is needed, whether the emergence of important new use-values, expansion of new markets, or improved production conditions. Under such an impetus, stagnation can give way to moderate activity in at least a few sectors of production. At this stage, the relatively low wages and prices for machinery and materials, as well as expanding markets, help to raise the rate of surplus value (and profit), so even when individual capitals raise productivity to obtain extra surplus

value, it does not immediately lead to a fall in the rate of profit. The 'counteracting factors' mentioned earlier exercise considerable force.

Moderate activity gives way to the phase of prosperity, when the profit rate tends to rise in not only some leading sectors but generally. Moreover, the expansion of one sector leads to increased demand for products in other sectors, creating a virtuous cycle for capital. But the new production methods introduced at first by individual capitals within the leading sectors steadily spread more widely to raise the productive power of labour across the economy. This results in a heightening of the organic composition of capital that begins to bring down the rate of profit. The lower profit rate spurs even more rapid accumulation by making it necessary to invest a greater quantity of capital to obtain even the same amount of profit. And that increased accumulation in turn heightens the organic composition of capital even further.

During the phase of prosperity, the accelerated accumulation and increased sale of products leads to an absolute rise in the quantity of profit despite the falling rate of profit. On the surface, everything seems to be humming along. At this point, as the memory of the last crisis fades away, articles may begin to appear in the financial press about how 'things are different this time around'.

However, the fall in the rate of profit that accompanies the increased pace of accumulation 'gives rise to a competitive struggle' (p. 365) between capitals, marking the point at which the phase of prosperity begins to give way to the phase of overproduction. The 'competitive struggle' Marx refers to arises from the need to compensate for the fall in the rate of profit by an increase in the mass of profit. He notes that big capital possesses the conditions necessary to succeed in that endeavour, whereas smaller capital and new capital 'must first acquire them', leading to a fierce struggle between these actors.

This competitive struggle is fuelled by an expansion of the credit required by individual capitals to cover the steadily rising minimum level of capital investment. Capitals unable to keep up must either shift to some production sector with a lower minimum level or take the 'adventurous paths' of speculation and swindles. The frenzied competition that emerges from (and in turn spurs) accelerated accumulation increases demand for labour power, thus shrinking the 'relative surplus population' of workers. The temporary increase in wages that results drives down the rate of surplus value, causing the profit rate to sink further.

Nevertheless, on the surface of things, the economy is 'booming': the quantity of profit, wages, stock and real-estate prices continue to rise. But this is just the 'storm before the calm' – the phase of overproduction that will be followed by prolonged economic stagnation.

As the cycle enters the phase of overproduction, there is a 'plethora of capital', which Marx defines as 'capital for which the fall in the profit rate is not outweighed by its mass' (p. 359). Under the sharp decrease in the rate of profit, additional investment of capital only yields the same or even less profit than before. Marx says that the 'overproduction of capital' (which 'always involves overproduction of commodities') means the 'overproduction of the means of production' that 'can be applied to exploiting labour at a given level of exploitation' below which 'disruption and stagnation in the capitalist production process, crisis, and the destruction of capital' (p. 364) would occur. Crisis is the forcible solution to the overproduction of capital through mothballing or destroying the means of production and labour power that cannot serve the immediate needs of capital augmentation (even though otherwise they could be used to produce useful things).

The contradictory process of capital accumulation that culminates in crisis might be summarised as follows:

The development of productive power in pursuit of profit raises the composition of capital, leading to a fall in the profit rate accompanied by an increase in the mass of profit; this 'double-edge law' in turn spurs even faster capital accumulation and concentration that heightens the capital composition further. The falling profit rate raises the minimum level of capital investment necessary, unleashing a 'competitive struggle' between individual capitals that larger capitals are in an optimal position to win, while smaller capitals are forced into desperate speculation and swindles (further inflating the real-estate and stock bubbles). Amidst the intensified competition, demand for labour power drives up wages temporarily, leading the profit rate to fall sharply, which generates a 'plethora of capital' unable to function at the low profit rate. Crisis temporarily resolves the overproduction of capital by clearing away the excess and driving down wages, thereby exposing the absurdity of a social system that leaves human needs unmet while letting its means of production and labour power go to waste.

MICHAEL SCHAUERTE

Socialist Standard February 2022

The Bogey of Overpopulation

THE SOCIALIST Party are optimists for the future of the planet. Unlike the Malthusian-influenced eco-dystopians predicting the extinction of humanity, we actually hold that society is capable of feeding and sheltering our growing global population and can keep all healthy and contented. Very obviously, we add one huge caveat which is that we require a world socialist system to achieve that goal. Otherwise, those catastrophists may turn out to be correct that our present civilisation could collapse with dire consequences such as climate-change refugees storming the gates of Fortress Europe, reminiscent of the Barbarian hordes of the past.

It takes socialists to explain that the deprivation and squalor that most working people experience is caused by the operations of the capitalist market system, not by population size and its carbon footprint. Regardless of the progress of technology and its ability to produce an abundance of social wealth using fewer resources, great numbers of people will always endure deprivation. Socialists suggest that the so-called overpopulation problem has been popularised to disguise the intrinsic failure of the capitalist exchange economy to provide a decent level of security and comfort to most of the world. Other than specific situations complicated by military conflict there has always been enough food to feed everyone, but billions have faced hunger because they didn't possess the money to buy it.

It is worth recalling the actual experience of David Crawford, who was a member of Oxfam's humanitarian support team and the senior humanitarian adviser in Africa's Sahel region. Back in 2007 when interviewed by the BBC (<https://tinyurl.com/3h6kaysu>) he explained that the media widely perceived that food shortages were the cause of widespread hunger. Although this played a role at a local level, it wasn't the main cause as he learned from experience in Niger which was still exporting food, and staple cereals were available in the markets. The problem, Crawford pointed out, was that the poorest couldn't afford to buy it in the markets. Once people ran out of money they fell into debt and sold off their valuable livestock. For the poor, the main problem is access to food, not the availability of food.

But let's not take Crawford's word.

Robert Watson, a former chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

explained: 'hunger is not a food production problem. It is an income problem.'

Robert Fox, formerly of Oxfam Canada: 'There is no food shortage in the world. Food is simply priced out of the reach of the world's poorest people.'

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, when World Bank Managing Director: 'there is not a global food shortage — there is a price crisis'.

American Association for the Advancement of Science: 'the problem is that many people are too poor to buy readily available food... Even though "hungry countries" have enough food for all their people right now, many are net exporters of food and other agricultural products.'

The truth is out there about the effects of capitalism, but regardless of the facts on the ground, there are those involved who still do not recognise socialism as a viable solution and continue with their palliatives, over and over again, without ever learning the lessons of experience. If food shortages exist, it is due to this economic system where production is primarily for private profit, and despite desperate demand, the capitalists are unwilling to satisfy such demand unless the return is sufficiently rewarding. The ability to produce and distribute is not the issue. The Socialist Party's case is that the necessary changes cannot and will not be permitted by capitalism.

We can only for now speculate, but even under the constraints of the profit system since 1948, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization

and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, annual world food production has outpaced the increase in population.

The former director of the Agricultural Economic Institute at Oxford University, Colin Clark, has estimated that if the world's farmers were to use the best methods of farming available, an American diet could be provided for 35.1 billion people.

Roger Revelle, former director of the Harvard Center for Population Studies, estimated that Africa, Asia and Latin America alone, simply by using water more efficiently, could feed 35 billion to 40 billion people.

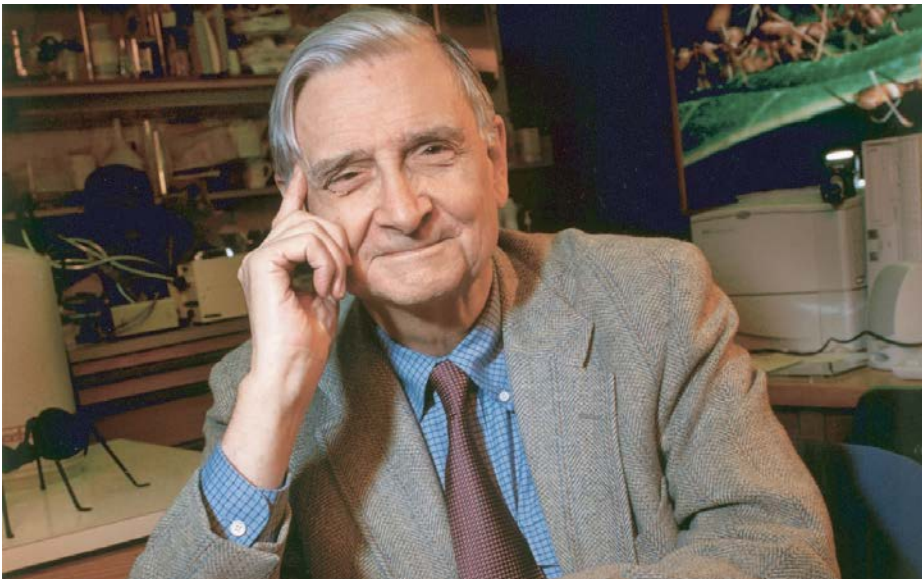
While accepting the truism that we live on a finite planet and infinite growth is impossible, socialists propose a steady-state, zero-growth model of the economy for the future society and envisage an anti-consumerism trend to prevail with an expected drop in consumption levels following an initial phase of higher production to raise the impoverished to a decent standard of living. We say this sustainable future can come about because in a society of social equals there will be no need for conspicuous consumption and public ostentation to display superiority and social status. The conditions are now ripe for socialism, ie, production for use where all humanity cooperates in the common social interest. In a sane world fit for human beings the economic forces fostering malnutrition and under-nourishment disappear.

ALJO



Credit: ANDREY POPOV/DREAMSTIME

Death of a Sociobiologist



Credit: PLoS

E.O. WILSON, the inventor of the theory of genetic determinism he called 'sociobiology', died on 26 December at the age of 92. He was an avowed opponent of socialism, writing in his 1978 book, *On Human Nature*:

'The perception of history as an inevitable class struggle proceeding to the emergence of a lightly governed egalitarian society with production in control of the workers... is based on an inaccurate interpretation of human nature' (Penguin edition, 1995, p. 190).

Later research and findings in the field of genetics discredited the view that there were specific genes for specific behaviour patterns such as aggression or territoriality. Genes govern a person's physical characteristics including certain cognitive facilities, and susceptibility to certain health conditions.

In her obituary in the *Guardian* (6 January) Georgina Ferry made the mistake of attributing to Wilson the view that his 'sociobiology' set out to refute. Referring to his book on human nature, she wrote:

'Today most scientists accept, as Wilson argued, that genetically determined "human nature" includes the capacity to develop extremely flexible patterns of social behaviour under the influence of culture'.

Most scientists do indeed accept this, and did before it was challenged in the 1960s and 1970s by the likes of Konrad Lorenz and Robert Ardrey... and E.O. Wilson. Here, for instance, is what the anthropologist Alexander Allard wrote in 1972:

'Culture is learned and shared. It is rooted in biology. But although this is true (the capacity for culture is part of a normal human's brain structure), culture frees man to an unprecedented degree from strictly biological controls over the development and maintenance of behavioral systems.

Culture is biologically adaptive. That is, human populations imbedded, like all animal populations, in specific environments adjust to these environments largely through culture' (*The Human Imperative*, Columbia University Press, 1972, pp. 21-22).

The fact that a science writer like Ferry should make such an elementary mistake shows the extent that 'sociobiology' has been forgotten by scientists, though it may also reflect the fact that in later years Wilson redeemed himself to a certain extent by becoming a champion of biodiversity.

However, Wilson's anti-socialism, as opposition to 'a lightly governed egalitarian society with production in control of the workers', still survives among pro-capitalist ideologues. In a eulogy of Wilson in *The Times* (5 January) Lord Finkelstein, the Tory peer, wrote:

'Humans are animals too, after all, so our social organisation, our behaviour, our hierarchies, our urges will, to some extent at least, be the product of our biology.'

That's true of our urges no doubt, but not our particular 'social organisation' beyond the fact that we are social animals, and certainly not our 'hierarchies'. These are only influenced by our biology insofar as our biology 'includes the capacity to develop extremely flexible patterns of social behaviour'.

This does not mean that, as Finkelstein claims, that humans are a 'blank slate' or that all individuals are the same. As Allard put it:

'Individuals are born different. The outcome of heredity and experience will lead to differences in temperament and ability which make it possible for the human group to function as a social entity.'

Socialists have always recognised this, as

in the long-standing slogan of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'. The equality socialism will bring is not through 'social engineering' somehow making everyone have the same abilities, but a society in which everyone, whatever their ability, has the same access to what they need to live and enjoy life.

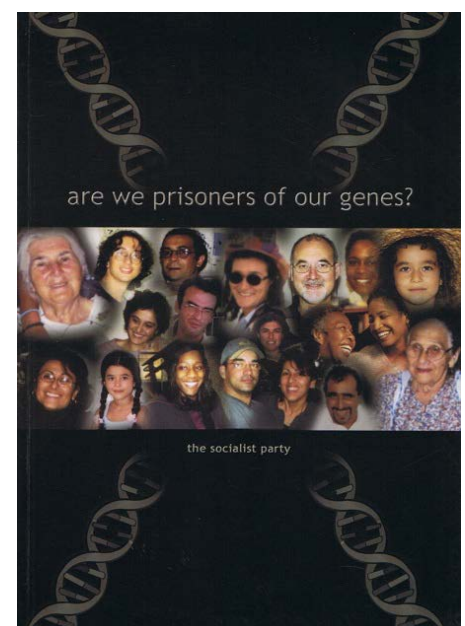
Finkelstein is right on one point: that it is unfair to say, as some have done, that Wilson was a 'racist'. He wasn't. He was just an anti-socialist and a biological determinist.

Later in his eulogy, Finkelstein abandons 'to some extent at least' and boldly declares:

'...Wilson was achingly, obviously right. How likely is it that human beings are the one species whose capacities and behaviour aren't *largely influenced* by biology?'

It might perhaps have been unlikely that an animal would evolve whose behaviour was overwhelmingly influenced by the non-biological culture they created to survive, but this is precisely what did happen. It is one of the features that distinguishes humans from other animals. This is not Marxist or 'left-wing'. It is simply the truth. To be convinced of this, Finkelstein just needs to consult any textbook on anthropology. He will find Ferry's statement confirmed that 'most scientists accept that genetically determined "human nature" includes the capacity to develop *extremely flexible* patterns of social behaviour under the influence of culture'.

ALB



**Available from Socialist Party,
price £5.50 postage included**

Socialist Standard February 2022

Consumerism and Literature – The Epoch That Ate the World

THROUGH THE medium of fiction, writers and poets have always shed a spotlight upon their own societies or speculated upon the possible directions in which said societies might travel. From William Morris's uplifting *News from Nowhere* to Huxley's and Orwell's dark dystopian futures and more, fiction provides a platform for the unthinkable and unknowable. Science fiction writers have often been in the front of the field, exploring the unimaginable.

The Space Merchants, serialised in *Galaxy Science Fiction* magazine in 1952, is one of a number of sci-fi novels co-written by Frederick Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth. Here government and corporatism have become subsumed in the power of the advertising agencies. The sub-continent of India has been turned into a 'single manufacturing complex, Indiestries.' Mitchell Courtenay is a Fowler Schocken Associate who is now in charge of the account to 'sell' Venus to the public. There's a rocket built already to go. The red in tooth and nail capitalism is being opposed by an underground organisation, the World Conservationist Association known as 'the Consies'. Courtenay is an avid supporter of the existing system, not least because of the material benefits he derives from being a star copy advertising executive. Courtenay's thoughts on Gus, a Consie whom he'd had close contact with: 'I hated the twisted minds who had done such a thing to a fine consumer like Gus. It is something like murder. He could have played his part in the world, buying and using and making work profits for his brothers all around the globe, ever increasing his wants and needs, ever increasing everybody's work and profits in the circle of consumption, raising children to be consumers in turn'.

A few years later we commented: 'Consider the advertising profession. Is it not one of the most typical of

capitalism's great institutions, and also one of the most necessary processes between the raw material and the commodity we consume? If there was no advertising, how would we know that our very life depended on our using pink toothpaste? In fact, without advertising, how would we know what to eat, drink, wear, inject, smoke, etc.? We would be completely lost' (Michael La Touche, *Socialist Standard*, May 1960).

How indeed would we know? Toothpaste (Gibbs SR) was the first advert broadcast on ITV (Independent Television) on 22 September, 1955. To channel the late Kirsty McColl, (*Innocence*), innocence has passed us all by a long, long time ago.

The Man who Ate the World, Frederick Pohl, Panther, 1979, has a fantastical plot twist because the poorer you are the more you're forced to consume. This is Sonny: 'The worst time was at night, when the

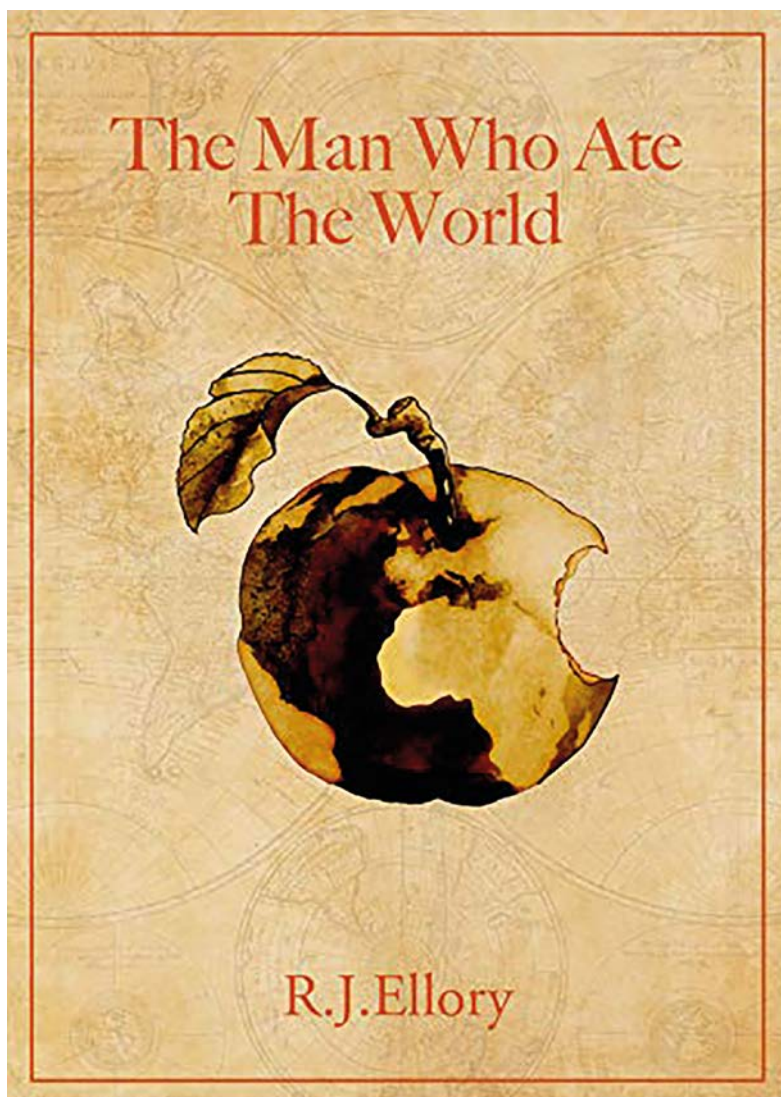
baby sister was asleep and the parents were grimly eating and reading and dancing and drinking, until they were ready to drop. And of all bad nights, the night before his twelfth birthday was perhaps Sonny's worst. He was old enough to know what a birthday party was like. It would be cake and candy, shows and games, it would be presents, presents, presents. It would be a terrible, endless day'.

This collection includes *The Day the Icicle Works Closed*, a science fiction version of straightforward capitalist greed: 'The Icicle Works was the most profitable corporation in the Galaxy... Dickon had plenty (of shares). But he wanted more... And for the last twelve months he's been picking up stock for a penny on the dollar while the rest of us starve.'

A 2020 novel by R. J. Ellory, is, like Pohl's, also titled *The Man who Ate the World*. Roger Ellory says of the title,

'(It) came about simply because it sounds really good in French (L'homme qui a mangé le monde)! Lots of alliteration. I guess it's also figurative, in that the truth is more than capable of consuming all the evil of the world.' The story is contemporary and there is no similarity to the Pohl story.

The protagonist here is named Joseph Conrad. JC is not a very naughty boy nor is he the Messiah although that question is occasionally posited. Joseph is a wage slave in a non-specified and nondescript job. He is made redundant. With his money assets totalling fourteen thousand pounds Joseph decides to discover who he is and what he's supposed to be doing with his life. There are faint echoes of Chauncey Gardiner (*Being There*) and of Forest Gump in the character of Joseph Conrad but he is not autistic or an idiot savant. There are echoes too of the Queen Latifah 2006 film, *Last*



Holiday. Here again, a working class shop assistant who is under the impression she only has a very short time to live, gathers her assets and goes off to a luxury hotel in Europe to enjoy her remaining time. Her kindness to everyone is contrasted to the attitude of the bourgeois there too. Unlike in real life, in films good deeds are mainly rewarded, though the film's ending is a very ambiguous one.

The characters in Ellory's tale are all named after poets and writers. Spoiler alert: an exception is Richard Dadd who, although an artist, also murdered his father. The 'heavy' discreetly employed by the state to carry out its dirty work is named Richard Dadd. Nigel Dennis, publisher and blackmailer in the 1957 film *The Naked Truth*, with Terry-Thomas, Peter Sellers and Dennis Price, would have been very jealous of Ellory's Dadd who, as an information sponge, uses his control of data for the establishment's nefarious purposes.

Throughout the book Conrad is to be found quoting words of wisdom from various literary figures. Joseph's boss is named Menella Smedley (Menella Bute Smedley (1820–1877) was a novelist and

poet, and relative of Lewis Carroll, who wrote some minor novels and books of poems). The characters who meet in a brief sojourn in Ireland repay investigation by the reader into their histories and outputs. Joseph Conrad accidentally becomes the fountainhead of a social movement, *Random Acts of Kindness*. Various arms of the Establishment are less than enraptured to see the sheeple beginning to act independently.

'This Kindness business was all very well and good, but it was uncontrolled and seemingly uncontrollable. It was a wildfire, and firebreaks were needed. Perhaps those who sought to control public opinion were anxious about repercussion. The suggestion that individual citizens could make a difference was dangerous, but nowhere near as dangerous as collaborative effort to effect social change. The public did not understand. They never had and never would. They were little more than children, if truth be known. Politicians and bankers and media conglomerates needed to filter information, decide interest rates, enact laws and dictate codes of conduct, and if they did not then the society would tumble

into the abyss of anarchy.'

'New ideas were fine, as long they did not disestablish and unsettle the old and proven ideas that had served to maintain the order of things for more generations than anyone cared to remember. There was a way to do things, and no one had a right to change that way but those who were set to make the most money from it. Everything was dependent upon confidence- confidence in the government, confidence in authority, confidence in the banks and the police and everything else the establishment provided for the good of the people – and that was something that can never be threatened nor undermined.'

Typing 'Kindness' and 'Covid' into Google brings up ninety seven million plus results. The only reason that the working class have to be kind toward capitalism is that it long ago laid the foundations for the transition to a truly emancipated society.

Pressure to persuade the working class that capitalism, not socialism, is the best in this 'best of all possible worlds' is continuous. But, the choice is still ours. When are we going to become dangerous and collaboratively effect real social change?

DC

[R] Cooking the Books

The Return of Tariff Reform

IN AN article in *The Times*, headed 'PM has a lever to ease cost of living crisis', James Forsyth, the *Spectator's* political editor, wrote that 'tariff reform would be a good place to start'. He suggested the government 'scrap tariffs on all imports bar certain sensitive agriculture goods', claiming that 'abolishing tariffs on what consumers buy would help shoppers.'

The current rapidly rising cost of living – the index of this went up by 5.4 percent in the 12 months to December – is a crisis, but not the same for workers as for employers. For workers, it represents a fall in their standard of living. The remedy for this is an increase in money wages. Given the current labour shortage, this becomes a crisis for employers. Even without trade union pressure, the play of supply and demand on the labour market will bring about an increase in money wages:

'UK job vacancies surge to record high of 2.7 million as labour shortage worsens' (*Independent*, 12 November).

'UK labour shortages drive up wages' (*Financial Times*, 16 November).

'Moving jobs means big pay rise as firms fight for staff' (*The Times*, 12 January).

The *FT* reported:

'More than half of FTSE 100 companies

are now paying employees and contractors the voluntary "living wage" — which takes into account rising living costs — of £9.90 an hour outside London and £11.05 in the capital, compared with the current statutory minimum of £8.91, rising to £9.50' So, the government has an economic as well as an obvious political reason to do something to ease the rise in the cost of living, and no doubt will.

What about 'slashing import tariffs'? Would that work?

In the period between the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and the outbreak of WW1 in 1914, tariffs on food imports were a burning issue. After the defeat of Napoleon, the landlord class, which controlled political power, continued the war-time tariffs imposed on imported cereals as this kept the price and so rents up. However, a high price of bread meant higher money wages.

The factory owners resented this and launched a mass, and ultimately successful, campaign in the 1840s to repeal the 'Corn Laws'. They knew that reducing the cost of bread would also reduce money wages, so making their exports more competitive. They managed to convince large sections of the working class for well over 60 years

that tariffs on imports, a policy the Tories had begun to advocate under the name of 'Tariff Reform', would increase their cost of living and so reduce their standard of living.

But, as Engels explained in 1881 in an article on 'The Wages Theory of the Anti-Corn Law League':

'The average price of a commodity is equal to its cost of production; the action of supply and demand consists in bringing it back to that standard around which it oscillates. If this be true of all commodities, it is true also of the commodity Labour (or more strictly speaking, Labour-force). Then the rate of wages is determined by the price of those commodities which enter into the habitual and necessary consumption of the labourer. In other words, all other things remaining unchanged, wages rise and fall with the price of the necessities of life' (*Labour Standard*, 9 July 1881).

If the cost of living (the cost of producing the commodity labour-power) goes up there would be an upward pressure on wages. Which is what is happening today. 'Slashing import tariffs' would reduce this pressure; and so benefit employers; not that, for various reasons, it is likely to be adopted. It wouldn't make workers better off. At most it would just put a brake on their standard of living getting worse.

The Shape Of Things To Comet

Credit: Netflix



MOVIES ABOUT giant lumps of space-rock crashing into the planet come round every few decades, some having more impact than others. The earliest was the hit 1916 Danish film, *The End Of The World*, made within recent memory of a fly-past by Halley's Comet. 1979's flop, *Meteor* drew on contemporary Cold War tensions between the USA and the Soviet Union, and was inspired by Project Icarus, a plan to strike a potentially incoming asteroid with missiles. More recently, these films have come back into our orbit every twenty years or so, and in pairs, with blockbusters, *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact* (both 1998) turning impending catastrophe into a glossy spectacle. The latest two have switched emphasis more to how people on the ground might respond to such an event. 2020's *Greenland* followed a family's attempts to escape from the impact, although the only doomsday-from-space movie anyone's been talking about lately is Netflix's ratings smash, *Don't Look Up*.

Producer/director/writer, Adam McKay wanted to make a film about climate change, and with leftist journalist David Sirota, developed the idea that the lack of media coverage about it is like a comet heading to Earth which no-one cares about. The end result keeps the bluntness of this metaphor, while focusing not as much on apathy as on how capitalist society's priorities detract from dealing with the problem. *Don't Look Up* was devised before the pandemic, which has now given its message another topical spin.

Astronomers, Kate Dibiasky and Randall Mindy (played by Jennifer Lawrence and Leonardo DiCaprio) discover a comet six months away from striking the planet in an 'extinction-level event'. Teddy Oglethorpe (Rob Morgan), head of

NASA's Planetary Defense Coordination Office, arranges for them to present their findings to President Janie Orlean (Meryl Streep), who is dismissive and says that the government will 'sit tight and assess'. Frustrated, Dibiasky and Mindy then take their apocalyptic discovery to a newspaper, which drops the story when it fails to generate enough internet traffic, and *The Daily Rip*, a vacuous talk show with an ethos of 'keeping the bad news light'. On social media, Mindy trends as a 'hot' scientist, while Dibiasky is turned into a bitchy meme as a hysterical doom-monger. For the media, ratings and clicks are what's important, rather than substance.

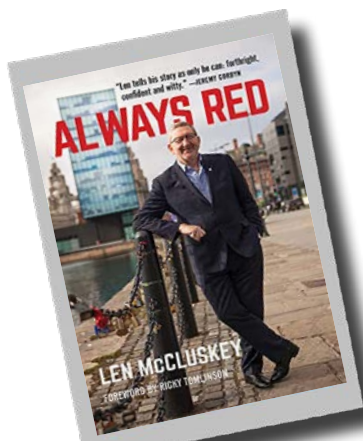
President Orlean only takes an interest in the looming end of the world when it becomes a convenient distraction from a sex scandal. She agrees a strategy to fire missiles at the comet, and because 'Washington's always gotta have a hero', a gruff Colonel takes command of mission 'American Savior' to fly out and blast the comet away. In one of the movie's cleverest scenes, the President explains how announcing this plan to the public will be pitched more like an advertising campaign for her government, filmed on a warship, ending with fireworks. The announcement hits its target, with the President's approval rating reaching 99.1 percent, but the missiles don't hit theirs. The launch is aborted when Peter Isherwell (Mark Rylance), creepy tech billionaire and prominent donor to Orlean's party, finds out that the comet contains trillions of dollars' worth of minerals. He comes up with a hasty and scientifically dodgy alternative plan to mine the comet, which gets support because of the jobs (ie, profits) it's expected to create. Dibiasky and eventually Mindy realise that the problem can't be resolved by working with the administration and corporations,

and join and galvanise the 'Just Look Up' grassroots protest movement. This is countered by the government's 'Don't Look Up' campaign, complete with MAGA-style baseball caps. Isherwell's plan fails, as does a probably sabotaged attempt by countries cut out of the mining deal, leaving the comet on its collision course.

Don't Look Up isn't at all subtle in its messages that protecting state power and the profits of big business are more important than saving the planet, and that the media trivialises and distracts from the issue. It's refreshing to find such obvious anti-capitalist points made in a mainstream, widely watched movie, and it would be nice to think that its popularity is because of its subversive slant. The way the film satirises a government's priorities is a bit blunted, though, as criticising a Trumpesque president is old hat these days. Its mistrust of the motives of tech companies is a blatant dig at the out-of-this-world ambitions of the likes of Elon Musk and, more pointedly, Jeff Bezos, Executive Chairman of Netflix's rival Amazon Prime Video. But while the film exposes some of the structures which hamper us in dealing with major problems, it doesn't offer any viable alternative, and didn't intend to. The 'Just Look Up' movement isn't in a position to make real change, as it's only a protest group shouting at those in power. The general public are relegated to background details, depicted as media-fed sheep or angry rioters, without their motivations being considered. The film risks being misanthropic by disparaging everyone, apart from scientists who stick to their principles: NASA is the only institution which isn't lampooned. So, alongside its criticisms of society, the positive lesson in *Don't Look Up* is to 'follow the science' concerning climate change and Covid, as well as any comet collisions. But as the film demonstrates, science doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is shaped by the priorities of capitalist institutions like big business and the state, so 'following the science' always leads back round to what works within capitalism. The film doesn't discuss this problem, though, and again it didn't intend to. Unfortunately, *Don't Look Up's* critique of capitalism doesn't go far enough, but still further than your average flick.

MIKE FOSTER

Seeing Red



Always Red
By Len McCluskey
OR Books. 2021.

McCluskey has always come across as the ultimate trade union bruiser and then, in later years, a close ally of Jeremy Corbyn. Originally a 'planman' on the Liverpool docks (drawing up plans of where cargoes from various ports would be held on ships), he rose through the ranks of the Transport and General Workers' Union before playing a key role in the creation of Britain's most powerful union, Unite – formed in 2007 from a merger of the T & G and Amicus. From 2010 until recently, he became its General Secretary.

The 'red' in the title refers not only to McCluskey's politics – he was an early supporter of Militant, though says he was never a member – but also to his love of Liverpool FC, with which he appears to have travelled all over Europe. He also appears to have seen red many times in the more metaphorical sense during his union career and the book is full of score-settling. Former Labour Deputy Leader Tom Watson – who was McCluskey's old flat mate – comes out of it particularly badly. And there is clearly no love lost with Keir Starmer either, who he accuses of duplicity.

One of the recurring issues in the book though is McCluskey's belief that the working class are ready to rally behind a radical left-wing programme of nationalisation and state planning if it wasn't for the right-wing of the Labour Party selling them out. This, of course, is the old Militant line, parroted today by their successors SPEW. (He also still uses some of their terminology, banging on not just about the Labour Right but the 'ultra-left' too).

This perspective leads him to often make a highly selective and one-sided analysis of events, the best example being the Labour performance under his friend Corbyn in the 2017 and 2019 General Elections. 2017 is portrayed as a great victory in all but name as Labour increased its vote with a radical programme of reforms by more than in any

other election since 1945. However, 2019 is portrayed as the Brexit election and that Labour's downfall was simply a reflection of this and its pro-Remain stance.

But this won't do. Not just because Brexit wasn't the only factor that led to their disastrous showing in 2019 – the public perception of Jeremy Corbyn and Labour's unrealistic long 'shopping list' of leftist demands were almost as significant. But it's also because their relative success in 2017 (even though they didn't actually win of course) wasn't principally due to the fact they presented the British working class with the radical stuff they had long been waiting for. After all, they'd actually done the same in 1983 and had come a big cropper then, as they later did in 2019 with an even bigger radical promise.

The main reason for Labour's relatively good showing in 2017 was because that election was also dominated by Brexit but that time they more successfully pitched themselves as a party that could be supported by Remainers and even some 'soft' Brexiters worried by a no-deal outcome. It was why Labour managed to win strongly pro-Remain Kensington and Canterbury for the first time ever, yet, against the national swing, could also contrive to lose the likes of hard-Brexit Mansfield and Stoke-on-Trent South for the first time in living memory. The correlation between increases in the Tory vote in strong Brexit areas and the increase in the Labour vote in strong Remain areas was statistically significant and the biggest factor at play, but McCluskey just ignores this. By 2019 the ground had shifted and Labour was by then simply left with an unpopular leader, an incoherent campaign and an unconvincing set of leftist reforms.

But it was ever the way with the left – always wanting to convince themselves the precise cocktail of radical reforms of capitalism purveyed by one or other of their factions would one day triumph, when most of the evidence is to the contrary (and not just in the UK either).

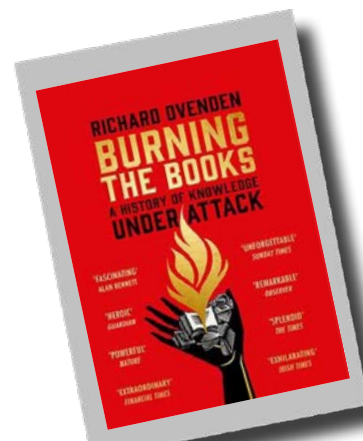
The best chapter is actually the last one, on 'fighting back' trade unionism as he calls it. Here McCluskey outlines how Unite has developed the tactic of 'leverage' and discusses how it works. A good example was when 'passenger transport company Go Ahead sacked a steward working on the buses in Manchester, we discovered its growth plan was to move into the Norwegian rail market by winning a contract worth £3.8 billion. We dispatched a team to speak to Norwegian politicians and the press, armed with a dossier detailing how this company dealt with rail contracts in the UK. The company was forced to weigh the benefit of getting rid of the steward against the threat to a multi-billion pound contract. Soon enough, the steward was back at work' (p.292).

There are a variety of examples of Unite using leverage in successful ways to defend its members and their pay and conditions. This is what good unions are for (despite

their imperfections) and this chapter is arguably worth more than the rest of the book put together. Indeed, McCluskey can take some genuine pride in the role he has played in developing this – and certainly far more than in what appears to be his enduring adherence to the Trotskyist tactics and programmes of the 70s and 80s.

DAP

The Power of Words



Richard Ovenden:
Burning the Books:
a History of Knowledge
Under Attack.
John Murray £10.99.

Probably the best-known case of book-burning was on 10 May 1933, in Berlin and other German cities. The Nazi authorities consigned many books, by Marx and Freud among others, to the flames. This was, however, only the first step in the Nazi attack on learning and scholarship, which led to over 100 million books being destroyed. Jewish culture was a specific target, of course.

This is one of many examples discussed in Richard Ovenden's wide-ranging study, which also deals with efforts to rescue or replace destroyed works. For instance, the YIVO archives in Vilnius, and later in New York, were able to preserve many Jewish books and documents. In many other instances, too, people have risked their lives to rescue books and other documents.

Loss has sometimes been a matter just of neglect, and the removal (theft) of texts has on occasion been an unintended consequence of war. The German Peasant War of 1525 was a rare example of documents being destroyed by those who lacked power: feudal charters and tax rolls that kept peasants in servitude. But in most cases the destruction of works has been a deliberate policy by power-holders, as a means of controlling the past and hence the present and future. The sixteenth-century Reformation, for instance, 'was in many ways one of the worst periods in the history of

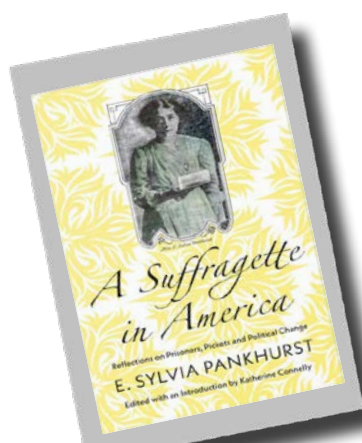
knowledge'. In England, tens of thousands of books were burned or broken up, especially in monasteries and other religious communities, and an Act of 1549 provided state sponsorship for this. It was all part of Henry VIII's declaration of independence from the rule of Rome. As another example, the destruction of Bosnian archives by Serb forces in the 1990s was in particular aimed at removing records of the presence of Muslims.

Oppressive regimes tend to keep massive amounts of information on their 'subjects'. In South Africa, officials in the apartheid regime destroyed large numbers of documents, making it difficult for subsequent inquiries into the oppressive system. Around the time Malaysia became independent in 1957, British colonial officials destroyed countless archives and documents, in order to conceal their racist and prejudiced behaviour. In East Germany, many files held by the Stasi were disposed of, though many citizens were still able later to view the files and see what information the state held on them. In 2019, the Turkish government began to destroy books associated with one of its opponents.

The web has resulted in a major change to how knowledge is recorded and preserved, but that does not mean written texts are redundant. Websites often disappear or change their address, and web archiving is a challenging task. Ovenden's book shows clearly the importance of recording information, how the powerful have often tried to manipulate this in their own interests, and how some people have managed to resist this.

PB

Machines and Hell in the US



E. Sylvia Pankhurst: A Suffragette in America: Reflections on Prisoners, Pickets and Political Change.
(Edited by Katherine Connelly) Pluto Press £16.99.

Sylvia Pankhurst visited the US in 1911 and 1912, each trip lasting about three months; the first included a few days in

Canada. She wrote an account of her visits, but it was not finished or published. Here Katherine Connelly provides a timeline, an extensive general introduction and short introductions to each chapter of the original text; she also supplied the title.

The visits were undertaken partly for financial reasons, but also to spread suffrage ideas in the US, where in only five states did any women have the right to vote by 1912. Pankhurst spoke to many suffrage organisations, but her write-up is more concerned with the social situation: the lives of working women, prison conditions, racism, and so on. In New York she observed that bad pay and conditions, such as a seventy-hour week, were not just applicable to immigrants but to all women workers. In a laundry the workers 'moved as though they were part of the machinery'. A factory in Nashville 'might well serve as a representation of Hell', such was the noise and dust. Prison conditions were appalling, with a 'dehumanising atmosphere'.

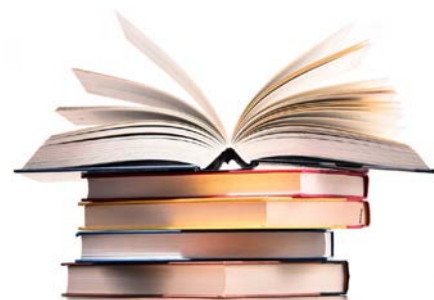
The visit to Nashville was a deliberate choice to study the situation in the American South and Pankhurst specifically chose to speak to a black audience. This was because many suffrage organisations marginalised or excluded black women activists, and some campaigners even argued that giving white women the vote would restrict the influence of black voters.

In 1912 Pankhurst also spent several days in Milwaukee, where a supposedly Socialist local council had been elected. The

mayor, Emil Seidel, was the vice-presidential candidate when Eugene Debs ran for president on the Socialist Party of America ticket that year. She acknowledged that the council had achieved relatively little and that women's needs had been overlooked. Such a 'top-down' approach to policy was not appropriate, and this may well have influenced her views back in the UK, when she rejected the authoritarian attitudes of her mother Emmeline and sister Christabel, and set up the East London Federation of Suffragettes, which linked the suffrage struggle to trade union activities.

For socialists the most interesting part of Sylvia Pankhurst's career came a decade later, when she rejected Bolshevism and stood for 'the total abolition of money, buying and selling, and the wages system' (see our pamphlet Sylvia Pankhurst and Socialism). This volume, however, provides a useful and informative look at her earlier views and the political situation in the US.

PB



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Student Unions

THE DEPARTMENT of Education and Science have published a consultative document with a view to restricting the finance of student unions. This document will effectively limit the activity of organised students throughout the country. Apart from the obvious effect of severely restricting social life for resident students, all extra-mural activities, such as societies and clubs, will be impinged upon.

The reason given for the restructuring of finance is that the public money is not subject to public accountability, and that money entrusted to students unions can easily be abused. It is strange that the schooling of children can be entrusted to student teachers, yet funds cannot be. This is indicative of the common capitalist maxim that money and property are more important than people.

In point of fact, abuse of union funds is an

extremely rare occurrence, and is anyway illegal without these new measures, hence the appearance of some of the officers of Sussex University Students Union in Court recently. The measures contained in the consultative document, therefore, can only be seen as an attempt to silence an avenue of protest that might at times embarrass the capitalist class.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain recognises that all unions (trade or

student) are only necessary in a capitalist system where workers are in such an inferior position that they have to “go mob-handed” in order to be listened to. As unions are part of a capitalist system, and no more, it follows that union organisation cannot lead to Socialism, but can only try to provide its members with the best possible living conditions under capitalism. However, it is to be remembered that all

working class organisation in the form of unions are a gauge to the maturity and consciousness of the working class. For this reason it is quite correct to protect student unions from any attempt by a capitalist government (Conservative or Labour) to restrict to any degree the effectiveness of an organised body of workers, (or unpaid apprentices in the case of many students.)

(Socialist Standard, February 1972)



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World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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spbg.discord@worldsocialism.org.

FEBRUARY 2022 EVENTS

Sundays at 19.30 (IST)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 6 February 11.00 GMT

Central Branch meeting

Friday 4 February 19.30 GMT

Did you see the news?

General current affairs discussion

Host: M. Browne

Friday 11 February 19.30 GMT

Capitalism and the Ecological Crisis

Extract from podcast from Marxist-Humanist Initiative's 'Radio Free Humanity', followed by discussion on why a 'green capitalism' is impossible.

Friday 18 February 19.30 GMT

Socialism, Communism. Marxism.

What's in a word?

Speaker: Howard Moss

Do we have exclusive rights to the meaning of 'socialism'?

Sunday 27 February 10.00 GMT

Evergrande: Chinese capitalism's Lehman moment?

Discussion on whether or not the collapse of the property company Evergrande would spark a financial and economic crisis in China that would have repercussions on the world economy.

Glasgow. Second Saturday of each month at The Atholl Arms Pub, 134 Renfrew St, G2 3AU Let's get together

for a beer and a blether. 2pm onwards. 2 minutes walk from Buchanan Street Bus Station. For

further information call Paul Edwards on 07484 7178193.



**Cardiff Street Stall,
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every Saturday, weather
permitting.**

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the

working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

The Charity Shop Manager



I have a friend who volunteers in a local charity shop. Its purpose is to support the district hospice and my friend tells me that the volunteers she works with are 'to a tee' dedicated individuals happy to give their time and energy to help an institution they see as a social asset. The fly in the ointment for a long time, however, was that the paid employee appointed to manage the shop was what could only be called a tyrant. She spent a lot of the time barking orders to the volunteers, criticising them for supposed mistakes and being unpleasant to customers coming in to look around and buy things. Not infrequently customers walked out when they were spoken to sharply by the manager or made to feel uncomfortable and one might imagine that, under such conditions, the volunteers too would vote with their feet. But that is not what happened. The volunteers, though doing unpaid work and finding themselves harassed for their trouble, didn't walk out but stuck at it because they considered the contribution they were making to what they considered a worthy cause overrode their own comfort and convenience.

What Was To Be Done?

But clearly this could not go on indefinitely and, eventually, my friend told me, when the hospice organisers invited all staff to attend a meeting to discuss potential changes and improvements to the shop, the volunteers saw an opportunity to bring things into the open. They wrote a letter outlining what had been happening and

at the meeting put it to the organisers that the shop was not working as well as it could since everyone was having to bear the brunt of what seemed to be the manager's own unhappiness with her existence. The manager herself was at the meeting and remained silent, even though the hospice organisers seemed keen to defend and excuse her. The volunteers were discouraged, but then suddenly the manager was gone. She had left apparently and everyone agreed that the new manager who then came in was a breath of fresh air. She treated all, volunteers and customers alike, in a friendly, polite way and everyone said how much they enjoyed coming to work in the shop.

Human Nature

When I told this story to another friend, her first response was the 'human nature' one. She said that many people behave badly when they are 'in charge' and that's the way things are naturally. But when I replied that the new manager was not behaving like that and that, given half a chance, most people, whether in charge or not, will actually behave in decent cooperative fashion towards those they come into contact with, she relented somewhat and said that the very fact that so many people volunteer to do things to help others without payment of any kind shows that human nature is actually a 'mixed bag'. And she was right. People's behaviour towards others is largely dependent on the situation they find themselves in and the state of mind that arises from that. In fact given the damaged lives of so many people in the

society we live in and the pressures caused by work, want or insecurity, we might reasonably expect less decent, less cordial, less empathetic behaviour than we actually find. Yet the reality is that, given even half the chance, most people most of the time will behave decently towards others in most circumstances.

The Lesson?

What lesson to draw from the charity shop story? Here was a band of people prepared to give up their time and energy without any kind of payment to help less fortunate fellow human beings but being stymied in this by one individual whose own troubled life drove her in an uncooperative direction. The hierarchically organised nature of work in the society we live in is a fertile breeding ground for such situations. But it is clearly not the way of organising things that the vast majority of people, given freedom of choice, would want. Of course, such freedom of choice is rarely available in the current society of production for profit with its imperative of 'making a living'. But, in a different kind of society, it could be. That different kind of society is one based on cooperation instead of competition, on free access to all goods and services instead of buying and selling. As many studies have shown, the human race has survived not because humans wish to compete with one another or to do one another down, but because they cooperate, as the title of one book on the subject, *The Survival of the Friendliest*, has it. So, as socialists maintain, in a future society of production for use not profit human beings will be eminently capable of cooperating as free and equal men and women to run a social system in which mutual help and support for the satisfaction of social needs is their guiding principle. Just, in fact, as those charity shop volunteers, assisted by an empathetic manager, are doing now in their own small way- though, it must be said that charity, while an inevitable feature of today's society, will disappear in all its forms in the society of voluntary cooperation and free access on which socialism will be based. It will simply not be necessary.

HOWARD MOSS